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COMMITTEE ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

Twenty-seventh session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 712th MEETING

Held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva,
on Thursday, 31 May 2001, at 3 p.m.

Chairperson: Mr. DOEK

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GE.01-42604 (EXT)

The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS OF STATES PARTIES (agenda item 4) (continued)

Initial report of Côte d'Ivoire (continued) (CRC/C/8/Add.41; CRC/C/Q/COT/1 (list of issues), written replies of the Government of Côte d'Ivoire (document without a symbol distributed in the meeting room in French only))

1. At the invitation of the Chairperson, the members of the delegation of Côte d'Ivoire took places at the Committee table.

2. Ms. LAGOU (Côte d'Ivoire) said that citizenship was a legal concept and that every country in the world had a nationality law governing the granting of that nationality according to well-established rules. *Ivoirité* ("Ivorianness") was a cultural concept not covered by any regulations but encompassing the values common to all those living in Ivorian territory.

3. Activities undertaken to disseminate and follow up the implementation of the Convention were by no means of a sporadic nature. Quite the contrary, they were part of an overall strategy which was implemented not only to inculcate respect for the Convention but also to give effect to Ivorian legislation on children. In order to raise public awareness, measures were taken to disseminate the Convention in the vernacular languages, using the services of "chroniclers" established in the various communities.

4. The right of all - young people or adults - to form associations was recognized and there were large numbers of student associations. One, the Federation des etudiants de Côte d'Ivoire (FECI), had come to particular public notice recently during demonstrations by its members. The Government had attempted to calm the protests, which concerned the organization's functioning, by offering mediation services. Classes had then resumed. There were no current reports of any claim of torture against members of the FECI.

5. Lastly, she pointed out that Côte d'Ivoire had been the originator of the cooperation agreement with Mali, a mid-term assessment of which would take place in July 2001. A decision had also been taken to set up a drafting committee to prepare the agreement to be signed with Burkina Faso. Her Government had therefore not expected to hear recommendations that it demonstrate initiative, since, in every case, it had been the driving force behind the previous ones.

6. Ms. BAROAN (Côte d'Ivoire) said that the Government had, after assessing the first activities launched to disseminate and implement the Convention, understood that only a broad and sustained effort to harmonize all regulatory and legislative texts could make it possible to achieve the objectives that had been set. To support the process of dissemination and awareness raising, the Government had put in place a number of mechanisms, including the "chroniclers" in vernacular languages, and it drew support from the activities of the entire network of non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

7. With regard to "ivoirité" and citizenship, it should be noted that a person needed only one Ivorian parent to have the right to Ivorian nationality. However, the concept of "ivoirité" was

interpreted by some as limiting the concept of citizenship, in view of the eligibility criteria, among other factors. In fact, the only restrictions with regard to nationality concerned eligibility for the post of president of the Republic, since that was the only case in which it was required that both a candidate's parents should be of Ivorian nationality. For those seeking election to parliament, however, it was enough to have one Ivorian parent.

8. Still on the subject of nationality, the first group of measures to improve the birth registration system had not had the desired effect, because not enough attention had been paid to the real causes of the problem, which included not only the time limit imposed for declaring a birth (subsequently extended from two weeks to three months) but also, in particular, parent's lack of information and the insufficient number of registration offices. It had been found that parents thought that they had to pay for the procedure, whereas in fact the declaration itself was free, while the birth certificate was subject to a tax payment. As for registration offices, the public did not always have access to State offices, which existed only in the large urban centres, and, although travelling judges were authorized to issue birth certificates, their tours took place on an irregular basis. The Government was aware of the problems and was currently finalizing the details of a plan of action to ensure that all children were registered, to ensure that their rights as Ivorian citizens were clearly established. It was considering, among other provisions, ways of reducing the amount of documentation to be provided by the parents, who, if they themselves lacked a birth certificate, had to establish their own identity by going through a lengthy court procedure.

9. As for the concept of the representation of children, there was a range of situations in which minors had to be represented by their legal guardians (father, mother or a substitute figure). That was not to say that the law did not recognize children's rights. In practice, minority was equivalent to immaturity and the age of the person concerned was taken into consideration. Thus, a child's consent to a labour contract was required at the age of 16. From the age of 15 the child was required to state whether or not he or she wished to be adopted. In all cases, the interests of the child were taken into account, the aim of representation of the minor being not to leave the child defenceless. Where sexual offences were concerned, the law acted to protect the child victim and ensure that the guilty party was punished. If the minor was the aggressor, he or she could not be prosecuted in the criminal courts. Minors were, however, subject to civil prosecution, but in that case their parents had to represent them.

10. As far as the media were concerned, negotiations were in progress to set up a national commission to monitor and control publications aimed at the young. Those who offended against legislation to protect children against abuse by the press and other media would be punished. As a general rule, the government considered that children's interests should be protected by all parties and required magazines aimed at the youth market to play an educational role.

11. With regard to the bill to establish free and compulsory schooling, the Government sought to conclude agreements with new partners, in addition to those already agreed with the United Nations Economic, Social and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), as it was determined, despite its lack of resources, to provide all the budgetary funding needed for its massive reform programme, which would otherwise be doomed to failure.

12. With regard to legal assistance for children and whether they could bring a legal action, a distinction had to be drawn between civil and criminal cases. In a criminal case, a child of any age could apply direct to a prosecutor, who would lodge the action on his or her behalf. A child claiming civil compensation had to be supported by a third party, that applied to any civil action, since the child did not have legal capacity. The child could choose a representative, having taken advice from his guardians to ensure that expenses were covered. A child involved in such a case was fully entitled to legal assistance and the judge was obliged to appoint a defence lawyer. In Abidjan, preference was always given to a barrister specializing in cases involving children or to another lawyer who was at least as well qualified. In cases of disagreement with the lawyer, the age of the child was taken into consideration, in that, in the case of children 16 and over, the child's opinion was paramount, whereas for children below that age the decision was taken by the judge in accordance with the child's best interests.

13. Mr. KOUAKOU (Côte d'Ivoire) said that work on a code specially relating to children had begun in May 1999 and a committee of experts had been appointed. Owing to the pressure of events, however, no progress had been made on a field study undertaken to ensure that the code would take people's real needs into account. The Government was nonetheless determined to complete the information-gathering required to introduce the code.

14. Article 3 of the Constitution prohibited physical or moral torture. In that context, it was worth noting that, for the first time, a military court had dismissed a statement obtained under torture. Campaigns were conducted to raise awareness of that issue and impunity did not exist. The Government was determined that members of the police or the gendarmerie who were guilty of misdemeanours should be prosecuted and punished.

15. A children's squad comprising police officers and social workers had been established. Its work was supported by NGOs. Although its resources were limited, the squad was successfully preventing and cracking down on crime. The 48-hour time-limit for police custody, was subject to a full range of legal guarantees, including the prohibition of arbitrary treatment under the Constitution. The Government attached great importance to that principle.

16. The Constitution provided for special protection for disabled people and general policy legislation had been drawn up in 1998, one aim being to facilitate access by disabled people to education, employment and some specialized services. The relevant implementing decrees should be adopted during the course of 2001.

17. With regard to the implementation of the Convention by the courts, several judicial decisions had already been handed down, one of which related to article 19, concerning ill-treatment. A 14-year-old boy who had been subjected to serious physical abuse by his father had laid charges direct to the gendarmerie, raising the question whether he should receive legal aid and whether a prosecution should be undertaken. The prosecutor had authorized continuation of the proceedings and the boy had received legal aid. The father had been given a suspended sentence.

18. Mr. KOFFI (Côte d'Ivoire) said that the Government had decided on the following priorities: improved health management for women and children, better social security for the whole population, including health insurance, free compulsory education up to the age of 16 and

better protection for children from employment, trafficking and prostitution. To make them credible, those priorities were backed up by plans of action, which either already existed or were in hand. For health management the Government had announced that it would contribute up to 15 per cent of the social security expenditure devoted to combating the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Measures to make schooling free and compulsory would be phased in gradually, since it would be foolish to try to accomplish the whole process within a year. A detailed commitment had been made, however, with the initial focus on primary education. The programmes set up to fund the process were making appeals to donors, including the African Development Bank, bilateral donors and the World Bank. Funds had already been received to build more educational infrastructures. The State-funded portion of the education budget would cover running expenses, as well as providing for a small degree of investment, the proportion of which had been increasing annually since 1999. Among other measures to provide for the gradual introduction of free education, it had been decided that uniforms would no longer be compulsory as from the beginning of the school year in September 2001.

19. Ms. CISSE (Côte d'Ivoire) said that a monitoring committee had been set up to settle any coordination problems arising in the implementation of measures to benefit children. A programme was also to be prepared to involve women and children in assessing the implementation of economic and social development projects relating to them.

20. As far as disabled children were concerned, an implementing decree relating to the 1998 law had been prepared by several ministries in cooperation with associations of disabled people. The legislation covered a range of provisions, including health, education, employment, leisure, the family and access to public places. In the employment field, a programme to promote the recruitment of disabled people in the civil service had been in place since 1998. In 2000, 45 disabled people had been hired in the public service. Employers, too, were required to observe quotas under the programme, failing which they were fined. The income from the fines was used to finance job creation for disabled people.

21. Ms. COULIBALY (Côte d'Ivoire) said that the Children's Parliament had been set up in 1992 and revived on 30 April 2001. Every region of the country and every social class was represented. The Parliament worked together with the Association des jeunes travailleurs de Côte d'Ivoire. It did not have its own budget, but its activities were supported by the Government and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). It called on adults only for technical support and developed its own plans of action. Its advice was sought on programmes relating to children, such as the care of AIDS orphans or cooperation with UNICEF. The Government hoped to strengthen its role and intended to follow the progress of the sessions of its General Assembly regularly. In 2000, a study had been conducted to assess its impact, the results of which would be used on its future course.

22. Ms. LAGOU (Côte d'Ivoire) said that an Ivorian delegation had recently taken part in a conference in Egypt on African children, in which a representative of the Children's Parliament had participated.

23. The CHAIRPERSON invited the Committee members to consider special protection measures.

24. On the question of refugees, specifically the 100,000 or so Liberian refugees still living in camps along the border, he asked about the implementation of measures to bring about the family reunification of such people, their return to their country of origin and the integration of the children who remained in Côte d'Ivoire. An agreement had been signed between the State party and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. He asked what its provisions were and whether it was actually being put into effect.

25. Street children had numbered 175,000 in 1995. According to reports, that figure had increased. Was that due to inefficiency on the part of the NGOs working with street children. Was the Interministerial Committee established to help such children operational? What activities did it undertake?

26. He also asked whether the Government knew the number of children who worked. How effective was the regional agreement reached with the International Labour Organization (ILO)? Had the Government drawn up a specific plan for cooperation with the International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC) and ILO?

27. With regard to health, he asked whether the objectives of the expanded vaccination programme - to increase vaccine cover to 80 per cent, to reduce the number of cases of measles and to eradicate poliomyelitis - had been attained. Although the agreement by the leading pharmaceutical companies to lower the cost of treating people infected by HIV or AIDS represented significant progress, not all those requiring it would be able to receive adequate care, particularly in remote areas, as long as the infrastructure was lacking.

28. According to the written replies, there were 31,400 disabled children in Côte d'Ivoire, yet the number of children taken in by institutions or orphanages amounted to 800. What were the living arrangements of the other 30,600?

29. Ms. TIGERSTEDT-TAHTELA welcomed the Ivorian delegation's detailed replies and the State party's commitment to implementing the Convention. She would, however, be grateful for fuller information on the process of national reconciliation. What results had been achieved? Did the process take into consideration the interests and rights of children, given that, for example, some schools had had to be closed in the north of the country? The matter was, in any case, of supreme importance for the future of the country and of children in particular. She therefore encouraged the State party to maintain its policy in that regard.

30. Ms. AL-THANI, noting that the number of street children remained very high despite the range of measures that the Government had taken to resolve the problem, requested more information on the arrangements for such children with regard to health, education and food.

31. The effectiveness of the juvenile justice system seemed to be undermined by a shortage of staff and financial resources. In addition, children were often held together with adults for prolonged periods. She requested further information.

32. Ms. OUEDRAOGO, noting that the report mentioned the existence of obstacles to the collection of maintenance, asked what measures would be taken to rectify the situation. She also

thought that prosecuting a parent who did not pay maintenance for neglect had negative repercussions for the children.

33. Forced marriages of young people, although forbidden by law, were nonetheless common. Would measures be taken to put an end to the practice and to ensure that births were registered?

34. Given that only wage-earners could draw family allowances, what arrangements existed to help families without an income gain access to such services as health care, education and food aid?

35. The report contained no information on international adoption. Did such cases exist? If so, was there any follow-up? And did the State party envisage ratifying the Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Co-operation in respect of Intercountry Adoption? As for children placed in the care of third parties, in accordance with a common practice in Africa which constituted a kind of illegal adoption, she wondered whether the social services intervened when they were informed of violations of such children's rights.

36. Excision was not mentioned in the report, although it was still a widespread practice in the State party. What results had been achieved by the activities of the National Committee against Excision? Were the practitioners of excision who gave up their activities helped to retrain?

37. The Ivorian delegation had stated that the breastfeeding rate had risen from 3 per cent to 11 per cent, which constituted substantial progress. She wondered whether the International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes was observed and whether national nutrition programmes promoted breastfeeding.

38. She also wished to know how severe punishments were for young drug addicts and drug traffickers.

39. On the question of medicine, she wished to know what results had been obtained from the programme to promote traditional medicine and what measures were taken to eliminate the illicit sale of medicines.

40. As for adolescent health, she wondered whether policies on the prevention of AIDS, sexually transmitted disease and early pregnancy were implemented. Could young mothers continue their schooling after giving birth? What measures were taken to ensure the mental health of adolescents?

41. Ms. KARP said she welcomed the signing of the bilateral agreement on trafficking in children but wished to emphasize the need to train further border-control personnel and to set up programmes for the rehabilitation of the children concerned.

42. With regard to child labour, she asked whether there were any legal provisions to curb the sexual violence to which girls who worked as domestic servants were subjected and whether

any studies had been done on the subject. She also asked whether there existed labour inspectors who checked the implementation of the legislation.

43. With regard to minors in conflict with the law, she asked about the treatment of young offenders in regions remote from the capital, given that there were only five children's judges in the entire country. Did local judges apply specific provisions of juvenile law or were the children tried as adults? Were efforts made to avoid any difference in treatment between one region and another?

44. As for early, forced marriages, what had been done to implement the existing legislation? Had any prosecutions been brought? Were the police trained to take the problem seriously and not to treat it as a phenomenon that was tolerable on cultural grounds?

45. On the question of abuse in schools and institutions, she asked whether it was possible to prosecute teachers who violated the Convention in that regard. Were there awareness-raising programmes to teach parents to discipline their children using methods other than corporal punishment and to encourage them to establish a dialogue with their children?

46. Lastly, she requested further information on the weight given to children's testimony before the courts. Was there an age limit for taking such testimony into consideration? What attitude did judges take to statements by a child, not only in cases of abuse but also at the more general level?

47. Mr. CITARELLA asked whether, in view of Côte d'Ivoire's budgetary difficulties, the Government had started to provide free primary education, which was not a feature of the 1995 Education Law.

48. Noting that the decree governing penal establishments and laying down the conditions for the enforcement of penalties dated from 1969, he asked whether the text had been revised to bring it into conformity with the provisions of the Convention, particularly with regard to the conditions of children held in detention. According to reliable sources, adults and children in Abidjan prison were held in the same wing. He wondered whether the Government intended to take measures to rectify the situation. He was also concerned by the shortage of children's judges, who, according to the information provided by the Government, numbered only five for the whole country. He requested the delegation to provide further information on that point.

49. Ms. CHUTIKUL asked how much importance the Ivorian Government attached to child development and, more specifically, wished to know whether it helped finance pre-school establishments and nurseries or whether it devoted all its resources to compulsory primary education.

50. Mr. AL-SHEDDI, observing that Côte d'Ivoire contained over 60 ethnic groups and thus as many different languages and cultural identities, asked whether some minorities, such as Muslims, were not subjected to discrimination by other ethnic groups. In that context, it seemed that some groups were disadvantaged in relation to others as far as citizenship and access to services were concerned. He would appreciate the delegation providing further information on

that topic. Could it also confirm or deny the information that thousands of children under 14 worked in Côte d'Ivoire?

51. The CHAIRPERSON, referring to table 1 (b) attached to the written replies concerning the funding of the national educational system, asked why the budgetary allocation to education had, since 1997, been consistently higher than the actual expenditure on education.

52. He would also appreciate the delegation explaining the substantial fluctuations in the enrolment rate of girls in primary schools: 60 per cent in the 1995-1996 school year, rising to 82 per cent the following year and then falling to 62 per cent the year after that. He wondered what factors could explain such differences in school attendance rates. He also asked why the number of boarding schools was higher in the private sector, where there were 37, than in the public sector (12). He requested a breakdown of the data on children attending each type of school. He further wished to know how far the Government took account of article 29 of the Convention and of General Comment No. 1 (2001) on the aims of education in its national education policy. Did school curricula include instruction on human rights, including the rights of the child, and did such instruction take place in both State schools and the private Koranic schools?

53. Ms. OUEDRAOGO asked why the Koranic school was under the responsibility of the Ministry of the Interior and National Integration. She wondered whether the Government intended to raise it to the category of a denominational school and place it under the Ministry of National Education and Basic Training. She was also concerned by the teaching methods that prevailed in the Koranic schools, where the emphasis was on learning by rote and the use of harsh punishment for disobedient students. The Government should tackle the problem as a matter of urgency.

54. Ms. KARP asked whether the Government was undertaking an awareness-raising campaign on the problem of child pornography, which seemed to be extremely widespread in Côte d'Ivoire, and whether paedophiles were liable to prosecution.

55. Ms. TIGERSTEDT-TAHTELA wondered whether the Government intended to base its social security system on the payment of contributions and whether the proposed system would involve participation by the whole of civil society, including employers, in funding the national policy on social insurance. She also wished to know whether, where tax was concerned, Côte d'Ivoire had any sources of income other than taxes on foreign trade.

The meeting was suspended at 4.45 p.m. and resumed at 5 p.m.

56. Ms. LAGOU (Côte d'Ivoire) said that the Government had launched a process of national reconciliation with the aim of reconstructing the country, which had been torn apart by war. To that end, ministers had travelled the length and breadth of the country and conducted consultations in every region in order to hear the opinions of civil society as a whole and sound out the views of the public, civil society, religious and traditional leaders and representatives of all political persuasions. A reconciliation forum would also be held in July 2001. She added that, although the elections had led to heightened tension and indeed physical confrontations in the north of the country, traditional and religious chiefs had taken immediate action to negotiate

with the political parties in order to calm the situation and avoid the region coming to a standstill. At no time during those events had any schools been closed.

57. With regard to detention conditions for children, she acknowledged that, owing to a shortage of resources, children were held in the same wings as adults, although separately. There was, of course, a real political will to separate children from adults and the Government would take the necessary measures as soon as it had the means to do so.

58. The practice of forced marriage was prohibited by law. The Committee against Violence towards Women and Children believed that forcing a young girl to get married was tantamount to violence against her and, when it learned of such cases, it would take them up. Schools also tried to intervene when they heard of parents' intention to force their daughter to get married. The girl would be advised to ring the help line set up to combat violence against women.

59. Koranic schools were more or less obligatory for Muslim children. The Ministry of National Education was considering how to harmonize the curricula of the two types of school without holding back children in secular schools. Young Muslims could thus have part of their schooling in a Koranic school and then re-enter the "official" system.

60. As for excision, she said that the problem was not restricted to Côte d'Ivoire - the whole subregion was widely affected. The Government was engaged in combating the problem by raising awareness by various means, including the Committee against Violence towards Women and Children.

61. With regard to trafficking in children, the question was not whether the forces of law and order should or should not receive training in that area, since they were confronted with the issue every day. Under agreements signed with Mali an inter-ministerial committee worked in conjunction with the forces of law and order to intercept children at the border and repatriate them to their countries of origin.

62. Mr. BEKE (Côte d'Ivoire), replying to Mr. Al-Sheddi's question about religious intolerance, said that, after many years of perfect harmony and tolerance among the country's various ethnic and religious groups, a huge rift had developed between the Muslim north and the Christian south. To try to bridge the gulf, which had been exacerbated by the elections, the Government had embarked on the process of national reconciliation referred to previously. Côte d'Ivoire was a secular state which observed both Muslim and Christian holidays. The Government funded pilgrimages to Mecca and had opened an embassy in Saudi Arabia.

63. Mr. KOUAKOU (Côte d'Ivoire) said that Côte d'Ivoire had signed the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees. The Government had established a committee to deal with the question, operating under the Ministry of the Interior, which cooperated very closely with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. With regard to the situation of the 20,000 Liberian children who had been unable to return to their country of origin under the voluntary repatriation process, the Government had organized a workshop to harmonize the curricula of the two countries so as to avoid disrupting the children's education. The children had also been placed with foster families in the local communities. Côte d'Ivoire was proud to say that it had no refugee camps. International NGOs and other technical organizations worked

together to provide education for the children. The German agency for technical cooperation (GTZ) gave continued support in building new classrooms, in cooperation with UNICEF, and the World Food Programme helped with provisions for school meals. He noted that repatriation had to be freely consented to and that some children might choose to remain in Côte d'Ivoire. In such cases the Government aimed to integrate them while retaining respect for their nationality, their identity, their religion and their language. The Government thus believed that it had fulfilled the obligations arising from the international conventions to which it was party and had facilitated the full integration of young Liberians.

64. As for the survey which had indicated that a large number of children - 14.3 per cent - were engaged in an economic activity, he said that the survey had covered only one section of the population and had included all activities by children, including holiday jobs. Nonetheless, the Government was fully aware of the issue and intended to improve the procedures for combating child labour. In that context, an IPEC project was to be implemented in cooperation with the ILO in order to reduce the use of child labour and to prevent the trade in children, although Côte d'Ivoire had not yet signed ILO Conventions Nos. 138 and No. 182.

65. With regard to the administration of juvenile justice, he pointed out that there were seven children's judges attached to the country's higher courts, that all the country's judges were competent to try cases concerning children and that criminal procedure for juveniles had been in existence since the beginning of the 1960s. Owing to material, logistic and staffing difficulties, however, social workers were often unable to reach remote regions to organize the reintegration of children in trouble with the authorities.

66. It was true that Ivorian prisons were overcrowded: for example, Abidjan Prison, which had a capacity of 1,500, currently held 6,000 prisoners. The authorities were also fully aware of the need to move the Juvenile Observation Centre out of Abidjan Prison in order to separate child offenders from adults, but the means were lacking. Nonetheless, the young offenders' wing was physically separated, by a wall, from the adult wing and was equipped with workshops and a playing field. The presence of social workers in the complex of detention centres was also a positive element, making it easier to work with children in detention. Until very recently, the food provided for children in prison had not been very good, but, after intervention by the Minister for the Family, Women and Children, the situation had improved, largely through the activities of NGOs and religious organizatons.

67. With regard to action against drug trafficking, he noted that there were very strict laws, which the courts applied with the utmost severity. When children were used by traffickers or were themselves users, however, they were treated leniently by the Courts and provided with reintegration or drug addiction programmes, as appropriate, thanks largely to the support of some NGOs.

68. He emphasized that there was a law against any assault on a child's physical or psychological integrity and that corporal punishment was therefore banned in schools. Lastly, a study had been conducted, in both urban and rural areas, on the concept of a parental code; its findings would be tried out in the form of a private project in Abidjan.

69. Ms. BAROAN (Côte d'Ivoire) said that the legislature had done its utmost to reduce the procedural delays affecting the payment of maintenance. In that regard, she said that neglect of one's family constituted a criminal offence and that the threat of imprisonment hanging over parents who did not fulfil their obligations was generally sufficient to ensure payment of maintenance.

70. As for early marriage, which was necessarily illegal, since it could not be registered by a registrar if the age limits established by law were not observed, the problem lay in the fact that the victim had to make a complaint before the legal system could take action, victims were subjected to social and family pressures which were often too heavy to enable them to take such a step. Again, NGOs - which, indeed, had been behind the introduction of the legislation to make early marriage a legal offence - were most willing to help.

71. International adoption was governed by bilateral agreements. A judge verified that the conditions of the relevant agreement would be met in the receiving country and the adoptive parents were required to come to Côte d'Ivoire. A period also had to be left between the simple adoption and full adoption, so that the follow-up could be arranged in conjunction with the courts and social workers of the receiving country. Côte d'Ivoire also intended to ratify the Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Co-operation in respect of Intercountry Adoption.

72. With regard to child witnesses, she said that a hearing was given to children, with due account taken of their age. However, they were not allowed to testify in matrimonial or child custody cases, since it was generally considered that they could be subjected to pressure from their parents.

73. The fact that there were 60 ethnic groups in Côte d'Ivoire was not a problem, since they all spoke French. A child's ethnic origin was often not known and it made no difference to the extensive care provided.

74. With regard to sexual abuse in teaching establishments, any teacher suspected of sexual harassment was prosecuted, in accordance with the law, and was liable to heavy penalties, which could include being excluded from the profession. The police had also received training on sexual harassment, but they remained reluctant to intervene in cases where, for example, women complained of domestic violence. NGOs were also closely involved in that area and could even lodge complaints on behalf of the victim, provided they could obtain her consent.

75. Ms. ADJOBI (Côte d'Ivoire) said that Côte d'Ivoire was one of the countries in sub-Saharan Africa most affected by HIV/AIDS. It was estimated that 10 per cent of the population were infected, with the figures for pregnant women being 9.5 per cent and for children 9 per cent. A national AIDS programme had been set up in 1986 and relaunched in 1996. A large number of measures had been taken to help children under the programme and a think-tank was considering the question of mother-to-children transmission of the virus which was estimated to occur in 25 per cent of cases. The country also had 600,000 AIDS orphans. In some regions, action had been taken to help them and a plan had been drawn up to extend such activities to the whole country. In that connection, a new ministry had been established to

combat AIDS. Its mandate was to coordinate all activities on AIDS carried out under the auspices of other ministries, whether in relation to prevention or treatment of the disease. There remained organizational problems, however, despite the spectacular drop in treatment costs as a result of the recent agreement with the pharmaceutical companies.

76. As for vaccine-preventable diseases, the figures showed that the Government was on course to achieve its aim to eradicate poliomyelitis and neonatal tetanus, partly by holding national vaccination days. According to the available figures, there had been only one case of poliomyelitis in 2000, as against three in 1997, while cases of tetanus had fallen from 248 to 30 and measles from 9,732 to 5,729.

77. Ms. LAGOU (Côte d'Ivoire) stated that claims that children under six had had to work in the cocoa plantations were absolutely groundless. Anyone who knew the production cycle of the cocoa bean knew that it was impossible to use children in that sector.

78. The CHAIRPERSON said that the Committee had had an extremely useful dialogue with the Ivorian delegation, which had been frank and open about the extremely serious problems facing the country, particularly with regard to combating HIV/AIDS. It was clear that Côte d'Ivoire was attempting to put in place the best possible infrastructure and the Committee hoped that the international community would come to its aid, given the considerable efforts Côte d'Ivoire was putting in itself. Lastly, he hoped that the Ivorian delegation would encourage its Government to support the proposal to amend the Convention raising the number of experts on the Committee to 18.

79. Ms. LAGOU (Côte d'Ivoire) said that her country was fully prepared to meet all the concerns expressed, if it could, in doing so, obtain assistance in developing programmes and finding the necessary resources to put them into effect.

The meeting rose at 6.05 p.m.